



## Pledging to Reduce Waste in your Healthcare Facility

### Background

Every day, the healthcare industry produces more than 10 million pounds of waste. Of that total, a significant percentage is routinely (and mistakenly) disposed of as Regulated Medical Waste (RMW), which can cost up to ten times as much as solid waste disposal. In addition, RMW and solid waste often end up in medical and municipal waste incinerators which can generate a host of hazardous emissions. Hazardous wastes are another consideration that is sometimes overlooked by hospitals and even incorrectly mixed with RMW. Violations of RMW and hazardous waste regulations can carry stiff fines and negative press coverage. Thus, reducing waste makes sense from financial, environmental and liability/compliance standpoint.

Reducing waste and associated costs in a hospital facility is a simple function of education and training for the entire staff - nurses, doctors, purchasing departments, housekeeping, and administration.

### **TASK 1: Collecting baseline data on Regulated Medical Waste (RMW), Solid and Hazardous Waste.**

The collection of baseline data for waste streams involves looking at bills of lading and vendor receipts to determine the amounts of waste sent out of the facility as solid, infectious and hazardous waste. It is important to set a baseline year. If, for example, you've been actively implementing a waste reduction

initiative since 2000, that would be your baseline year, so you can most accurately capture results and progress.

The following resources provide spreadsheets and guidance for tracking waste reporting data:

1. H2E's Self-Assessment Guide  
<http://www.h2e-online.org/pubs/selfasmt.pdf>
2. Use the H2E Annual Summary and Goals Form to capture your data. (**Attachment 2**)

**Typically, 30-50% of what is disposed of as RMW could have actually been managed as solid waste. This could mean your facility is wasting thousands of dollars each year.**

### **TASK 2: Develop a RMW Reduction Program.**

- a. Perform In-Service Training for Staff
- b. Post VH2E Signage

Many thoughtful healthcare professionals who are unsure about a given item will err on the side of being conservative and dispose of items as RMW. However, the vast majority of unnecessary items that are found in RMW consist of items such as plastic packaging, newspapers, and soda cans.



It is vital to include nursing staff and infection control in the preparation of any in-service training on RMW segregation. Proper training is imperative if your facility hopes to realize the substantial cost-savings that can result from a good RMW segregation program.

There are many practical techniques that can assist greatly in RMW reduction. Appropriately sized redbags, centralized container location, and signage are simple techniques that can dramatically decrease improper disposal. In the long run, however, the key to any successful RMW reduction program is that it must continue to be supported and stressed as a priority to staff.

**The University of Virginia's MERCI program segregates clean, unused medical products and equipment from its Operating Rooms and donates the collected equipment to mission work.**

**For more information on the MERCI Program, check out their program brochure at <http://www.deq.state.va.us/p2/vh2e/MERCI.pdf>**

### **New RMW Regulations in Virginia**

In Virginia, the development of an RMW Reduction Program makes even more sense. On December 1, 2002, Virginia's new RMW regulations became effective. Therefore, all Virginia healthcare facilities should be holding some sort of in-service training for staff on the new RMW regulations. This is the perfect opportunity to initiate an RMW reduction program based on the new regulations.

To assist in this in-service training, the following documents are included as [Attachment 3](#):

#### **1. Key Changes in the Virginia RMW Regulations--A one page summary.**

#### **2. Does This Go in the Redbag? A reminder poster for display above or on redbag containers.**

#### **3. H2E's 10 Steps to Managing Regulated Medical Waste (RMW)**

##### **Looking Forward: Solid Waste and Recycling Goals**

The next step beyond collecting baseline data and implementing a RMW reduction program, is to examine other waste streams. As less waste is being disposed of as RMW, one of the first things you will likely notice through your waste tracking is that your solid waste numbers will increase. This is the perfect time to begin setting some realistic goals for source reduction and recycling!

Utilize a simple planning formula in which you set some numerical goals for a given year and develop a series of practical tasks that will help your facility reach its goals. Establish a committee that meets quarterly to monitor these goals and tasks and assess progress. On an annual basis, report your recycling and waste reduction numbers to upper management, and devise goals and tasks for the following year..

##### **Waste Reduction Pointers:**

- a. Use H2E's Annual Summary and Goals Form to record goals (Attachment #2).
- b. Set realistic and incremental goals-such as reducing a waste stream a certain percentage in the first year.
- c. Be sure to document changes in waste stream volume.

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